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Written statement* submitted by the Khiam Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[12 February 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Unprecedented rise in government restrictions on religious freedom in Bahrain

Khiam Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture & BHRO has regarded the results of the international study by the Pew Research Center on global religious hostility, as threatening to the entire human race.

Global religious hostilities, including government restrictions on how individuals can practice their faith and conflicts between religious communities of different faiths, reached a six-year high in 2012, according to the Pew Research Center with a growth of almost 26%.

A third (33%) of the 198 countries and territories included in the study had high religious hostilities in 2012, up from 29% in 2011 and 20% as of mid-2007. Religious hostilities increased in every major region of the world except the Americas. The sharpest increase was in the Middle East and North Africa which are still experiencing the effects of the Arab Spring.

Bahrain has marked an unprecedented rise in religious hostility. Incidents of religious hostility were on a clear rise in all parts of Bahrain especially after the government deliberately demolished 38 Shia mosques, representing almost 5% of the registered mosques in the Ja'afari Directorate.

KRC & BHRO has called on the international community to exert pressure on the Government of Bahrain to adopt international levels to ensure the protection of religious freedoms and provide international permanent monitoring mechanisms for freedom of religion and worship in Bahrain. The Pew Research Report has reported on religious restrictions and hostility on a governmental and social scale measuring hostility on a 10-point index.

The Government Restrictions Index (GRI) measures government laws, policies and actions that restrict religious beliefs and practices. The GRI is comprised of 20 (questions) measures of restrictions, including efforts by governments to ban particular faiths, prohibit conversions, ban worship or processions, limit preaching or give preferential treatment to one or more religious groups, and discriminate against certain religious groups.

The Social Hostilities Index (SHI) measures acts of religious hostility by private individuals, organizations or groups in society.

Although there is a clear rise in the Social Hostilities Index (SHI), the rise in the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) is much higher and more alarming. He has called on the Government of Bahrain to ensure impartial legislation, law enforcement, judicial and administrative processes to guarantee freedom of worship and religious practices without any discrimination

"Religious and sectarian discrimination can lead to frustration, hostility and fanaticism

The Government Restriction Index (GRI) results of the Government of Bahrain have confirmed systematic violations of human rights affiliated with religious beliefs and background, discrimination against religious groups, preferential treatment to certain religious groups and prohibition of religious worship rights for certain religious groups.

GRI No.4 has found that the Government of Bahrain interferes with worship or other religious practices of certain religious groups. A clear rise was reported from 2007 to 2012 after the Government of Bahrain began systematically prohibiting worship or religious practices of certain religious groups in many incidents. The result shows that Bahrain has grown from 0.33 in 2007 to 1.00 (max score) in 2012 confirming that the Government prohibits worship or religious practices of one or more religious groups as a general policy as stated in Pew's report.

GRI No.5 has confirmed that the Government of Bahrain restricts public preaching by certain religious groups. This is a clear indicator of the on-going restrictions on Shia Muslims in preaching their beliefs. The Religious Freedom Unit at the Bahrain Human Rights Observatory has reported 52 Shia preachers and artists being summoned in 2012 and 41 in 2013.

GRI No.8 found the government restricting religious literature or broadcasting. Bahrain scored 1.00 (max score) due to the continuation of restrictions on Shia Muslim publications. On 19 September 2013, the Minister of Justice in Bahrain, Sheikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa, regarded the biggest Shia religious foundation (the Olamaa Islamic Council) as an illegal organization that operates in breach of the Constitution and the Law. The Olamaa Islamic Council delivers Islamic teaching curriculums and lessons in accordance with the Ja'afari school of Islam to thousands since governmental schools and private schools are prohibited by the Ministry of Education from teaching Islamic studies in accordance to the Ja'afari school of Islam.

GRI No.11 confirmed practices of harassment or widespread intimidation towards certain religious groups. The Government of Bahrain scored the maximum score as well (1.00) in GRI No.11 while 2007 results were nil. This significant shift indicates the growth in the level of governmental intimidations to the Shia sect within the country. Governmental owned or financed media played a destructive role in insulting the Shia population and degrading them in official TV and newspapers. The campaign of inciting sectarian hatred against Shias continues. Pro-government social media accounts continue to use abusive and offensive language insulting to Shias. The BICI has stated in November 2011 that some programs in Bahrain's state-run television have incited hatred against the Shia population. Anti-Shi'ism continues to spread throughout Bahrain due to the utilization of official media and governmentally financed media to promote the culture of sectarian intolerance, noting that Bahrain only has one independent newspaper.

Many pro-government journalists writing in governmentally financed newspapers like Al-Watan newspaper (Arabic) have continued to frame Shias as Traitors, Safawis, Unpatriotic, and other degrading disesteemed social frames. State-run TV has failed to respect the cultural heritage, linguistic accent, social background of Shias. In fact, Shias are rarely seen in TV as presenters, actors, or guests.

The GRI index has also found that the Government of Bahrain displayed hostility involving physical violence toward minority or none approved religious groups. It confirmed that the Government of Bahrain did not intervene in cases of discrimination or abuses against religious groups. The GRI also indicated that the Government of Bahrain has formally banned certain religious groups from exercising their worship rights for security reasons as per their justification. Question 17 in the GRI indicated that the some levels within the Government of Bahrain did attempt to eliminate an entire religious group's presence in the country in 2011. 2011 has not only witnessed the demolition of 38 Shia mosques and tens of attacks on Shia places of worship; pro governmental loyalists were publicly calling for purifying Bahrain from the Shia sect. The Pew report also reported in GRI No.19 has used force towards religious groups that resulted in individuals being killed, physically abused, imprisoned, tortured, detained or having their personal or religious properties damaged or destroyed.

GRI 20.2 confirmed that the government practices clear discrimination between religious groups since one religious group or sect has more privileges than the others and/or that government access is unavailable to the other religious groups. The study also confirmed in GRI 20.3 that the government provides funds or other resources for religious education programs and/or religious schools with obvious favoritism to a particular group since Shia Muslims are denied the basic right to teach their children in accordance with the Ja'afari jurisprudence in public and private schools.